Guidelines for Completing the Kit Fox Habitat Evaluation Form San Luis Obispo County

The Kit Fox Habitat Evaluation Form is intended to be used as a tool for addressing impacts to the San Joaquin kit fox from project related activities. The use of the form, associated mitigation, and implementation of the previously established avoidance criteria (preconstruction surveys, etc.) should, in most cases, eliminate "take" of this species and reduce project impacts to less than significant. However, "take" permits from CDFG and USFWS will be necessary if the project may result in the death or injury to a kit fox. Additionally, USFWS may require an HCP for any project that it determines may result in "harm" under FESA.

1. Importance of Project Area for Recovery - As stated in the question, the Recovery Plan for Upland Species of the San Joaquin Valley, California should be referenced. Core populations include Carrizo, western Kern County, and Panoche. The Salinas Valley (Camp Roberts, etc.) and Cuyama Valley are important subpopulations. Therefore, if a project degrades or eliminates the corridor between Carrizo and the Salinas Valley (core to subpopulation) or the corridor between Carrizo and western Kern County (core to core population), a score of 20 should be assigned. If the project area is on the Carrizo, a score of 15 should be assigned. Projects on Camp Roberts and north along the Salinas Valley should be given a 12. A 10 should be assigned to land linking Camp Roberts and Fort Hunter Liggett and a 5 should be given to lands not associated with any of the above (i.e.-Atascadero area).

2. Habitat Characteristics - Most of the choices for this question are self-explanatory. However, there are some questions with regard to fallow agriculture and suitable vegetation absent. If a field has been fallow for more than one year, it should be considered as one of the other habitat types (usually annual grassland). In some cases, this question has been answered suitable vegetation absent" because the land had been disked specifically to lower the score. This is obviously inappropriate at both the landowner (take may have occurred) and biological consultant level. In cases where there are questions as to land use history, the project proponent will be asked to provide proof that this land had been recently, or is currently, in cultivation (i.e. receipts from crop sales or similar documents).

3. Isolation of Project Area - This question should be answered with respect to the immediate project area in regards to kit fox habitat availability. Is the project area part of a small corridor linking larger areas of kit fox habitat? Is it part of a large block of existing fox habitat?

4. Mortality - Kit fox mortality due to vehicle strikes is common. Any project that substantially increases traffic will increase potential mortality. Therefore, an increase in mortality would be likely for a large residential development or road widening project. Installation of median barriers, even without road widening, would produce similar results. An increase in mortality would also be expected if rodent control measures (poisoning) were implemented in the project area. Unknown mortality effects should be chosen for smaller housing projects ranging from single residences to small housing developments. Finally, the "no long term effects on mortality" option is appropriate for projects resulting in temporary disturbance (fiber optic cable or pipeline installation) as long as routine maintenance and patrols are not needed. Also, microwave tower installations resulting in trips every month or so would fall into the "no long term effects" category.

5. Quantity of Habitat Impacts - The amount of kit fox habitat impacted by the proposed project (see habitat evaluation form cover sheet) should be used to answer this question. All lands considered as impacted under this question are subject to potential mitigation.

6. Results of Project Implementation - Again, the entire area of kit fox habitat to be impacted should be considered for this question. An argument has been presented that if only a portion of a large property is slated for development, there will be no habitat impacts since portions of the property are still available for use by kit foxes. This is not a correct interpretation of this question since only the lands impacted by the proposed project are subject to mitigation. For example, if 1 acre of a 10 acre lot is going to be developed, that single acre will be lost as kit fox habitat and therefore impacts on that single acre will need to be mitigated. The single acre will be permanently converted and would not support kit foxes and a score of 10 would be appropriate. The temporary impact with periodic disturbance choice would be selected for a project such as a gas pipeline or a leach field, which would need to be maintained on an intermittent basis (every two years or greater). Although the project area will be disturbed, it will provide habitat for some length of time between disturbances. "Changes to agricultural crops" should not be selected if land is converted from grazed rangelands to another crop (vineyard, barley, etc.). Rangelands and grazing have been shown to be compatible with, and sometimes beneficial, for healthy kit fox populations. Conversion of rangelands should be considered as habitat loss, not an agricultural conversion.

7. Project Shape - The shape of the project falls into roughly three categories; single block, linear with a less than 40 foot right-of-way, and linear with a greater than 40 foot right-of way. Most projects fall into the single block category. This includes residential and industrial developments. "Linear with a less than 40 foot right-of-way" is probably the appropriate choice for fiber optic cable installations, seismic testing, and most pipelines. Roads, large pipelines, and large transmission lines would require a greater than 40 foot right-of-way.

8. Recent Observations - Start with data from the California Natural Diversity Data Base, but also check with other consultants, species experts, and local biologists.